

## CHAPTER ONE - PURPOSE AND NEED

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Vernal Field Office (VFO) of the Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is revising and integrating the Book Cliffs and Diamond Mountain Resource Management Plans (RMPs) into a new single RMP. The revised RMP will be called the Vernal Field Office RMP and will provide planning guidance for public land and federal mineral estate managed by the VFO in Daggett, Duchesne, and Uintah Counties in northeastern Utah, as well as a small portion of Grand County. The consolidated Diamond Mountain and Book Cliffs areas will be referred to as the Vernal Planning Area (VPA).

### 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

**Purpose** – The Proposed Action for this project is to revise and integrate the Book Cliffs and Diamond Mountain RMPs into a new single RMP that will guide management of public lands in the VPA. The revised RMP, also referred to as the Vernal Field Office RMP, will coordinate the management of the VPA with other land management agencies including: the State of Utah; the Ute Indian Tribe; the National Park Service (NPS); the Forest Service (USFS); the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); Daggett, Duchesne, and Uintah Counties; municipalities; and private entities. The revised RMP will also coordinate the management of federal subsurface mineral estates with private landowners, the Ute Tribe, or other nonfederal surface owners. The VFO will coordinate plan implementation with adjoining BLM Offices in Wyoming and Colorado as well as with the Price and Moab Field Offices

**Need** – This RMP revision process is necessary because of the dated nature of the Book Cliffs RMP, completed in 1985, and the incompatibility between the Book Cliffs and Diamond Mountain RMPs. Significant changes have occurred since completion of the Diamond Mountain and Book Cliff RMPs. Population growth and increased need for resource development has occurred, while concern for the environment has also increased. In addition to traditional consumptive uses (e.g., mining and livestock grazing), there is now an increased interest in uses that emphasize aesthetic values such as open space and increased recreational opportunities. These often-conflicting uses need to be addressed in terms of how they affect local communities, regional and state interests, and ecosystem health. Additionally, several changes regarding land management direction have occurred since the Book Cliffs RMP was written. These changes include the transfer of ownership of 47,978 acres of public land (owned by the Department of Energy and managed by BLM) to the Northern Ute Tribe; and the need to analyze leasing of 188,500 acres of federal mineral estate within the Hill Creek Extension of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation. These changes need to be addressed as part of this RMP revision and integration process.

### 1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

#### 1.3.1 Geographic Setting

The VPA includes the south slope of the Uintah Mountains, Uintah Basin, and the Book Cliffs region (see Figure 1). BLM manages approximately 30% of the land within this planning area.

Most of the land that BLM manages is in the eastern and southern portions of the planning area and is generally characterized by habitats associated with the Uintah Basin and Colorado Plateau. Other agencies that manage land in the vicinity of the VPA include the USFS, BIA, NPS, USFWS, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), and Utah Division of Lands and Forestry. Additional lands are held in private ownership or in trust by the United States for the tribe or for individual Indians. Much of the planning area is within the boundaries of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation, with Reservation Trust lands managed by BIA.

The Diamond Mountain portion of the planning area includes BLM-administered lands and minerals in Daggett and Duchesne counties and a portion of Uintah county northwest of the Green River. The plan is responsible for the administration of public land in Browns Park and the Diamond Mountain Plateau for the Little Snake Field Office of Colorado. For ease of management, the VFO also manages certain resources south of the Duchesne-Carbon county line in the Nine-Mile and Argyle Canyon areas of the Price Field Office. Similarly, the Little Snake Field Office administers public land in Browns Park and the Price Field Office administers certain resources in the Nine-Mile Canyon area. Administration of these agreed-upon resources is in accordance with the parent resource area's management plan. There are also fire suppression agreements between the VFO and these other BLM field offices.

The Book Cliffs portion of the planning area is located in northeastern Utah. It is bounded by the Utah-Colorado state line on the east, the Book Cliff Mountains to the south, the Green River to the west, and Blue Mountain to the north (see Figure 1). The Book Cliffs area includes public land and minerals in Uintah and Grand Counties. The VFO boundary officially ends at the Uintah county line; however, a small portion of the public lands in Grand County of the Moab Field Office is administered by the VFO under a memorandum of understanding. The agreement with Moab includes the administration of all resources and programs including land use planning, while a similar agreement with the White River Field Office in Colorado includes only grazing administration. Thus, this planning effort will not consider alternatives for grazing in Colorado.

Land ownership patterns within both the Diamond Mountain and Book Cliffs planning areas range from large blocks of BLM-administered public lands to small, privately owned blocks. This is complicated by lands where BLM administers a percentage of the minerals, while other owners hold the other interests in the land. Land ownership, surface administration and mineral management responsibilities within the VPA are shown in Figure 1 and described in Table 1.1.

### **1.3.2 Resource Setting**

Resources within the VPA include mineral resources, wildlife, fisheries, botanical (including listed and non-listed sensitive species), rangeland, wild horses, wilderness, cultural resources, water resources, wetlands and riparian resources, visual resources, and recreational resources. Land use and economic resources include oil and gas, phosphate, tar sands, Gilsonite, livestock grazing, woodland products, building stone, and rights-of-way. Opportunities for hunting, sightseeing, hiking, viewing historic sites, camping, fishing, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use provide public enjoyment, as well as additional revenues to businesses in and adjacent to the VPA. Unique features within the planning area include the White and Green Rivers; Browns Park, which provides crucial deer winter range and a high density of cultural and historical sites; the Pariette Wetlands, which provide habitat for over 100 species of wildlife; Red Mountain,

with its high mountain vistas and plentiful recreational opportunities; Nine-Mile Canyon, with its Fremont rock art; and the Book Cliffs, an area rich with resources with unlimited management opportunities.

<b>TABLE 1.1. LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE VERNAL PLANNING AREA (VPA) AND THE SURROUNDING AREA</b>	
<b>Federal</b>	<b>Acres</b>
Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Vernal Field Office (VFO)	1,697,039
BLM Moab Field Office (MFO)	28,473
Forest Service (USFS)	1,248,651
National Park Service (NPS)	50,113
Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	10,898
Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)	3,046
Indian Trust Lands Ute Tribe and Allottees (Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA] oversight)	846,669
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,913,362</i>
<b>State of Utah</b>	<b>Acres</b>
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)	32,210
School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA)	377,969
<i>Total</i>	<i>410,179</i>
<b>Private</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,223,791</i>
<b>Total Acreage in Vernal Planning Area (VPA)</b>	<b>5,547,332</b>

## 1.4 PLANNING PROCESS

The RMP is used by BLM managers to allocate resources and select appropriate uses for public lands. Regulations on planning are described in 43 CFR 1600 and planning program guidance is found in BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook. RMPs are meant to be responsive to public needs, including ranchers, miners, industry, recreationists, community planners, and scientific and environmental communities, as well as county, state, and federal agencies.

The planning process is issue-driven in that it responds to issues and questions raised by the public and agencies during the planning process and the subsequent National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. The planning process also responds to opportunities offered through changing land ownership, current information, or new technology. These issues and opportunities form the basis for the formulation of management alternatives and provide an indication of the level of impact of each management alternative. The planning process includes the following nine actions:

- Step 1 Identification of Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities
- Step 2 Development of Planning Criteria
- Step 3 Inventory Data and Information Collection
- Step 4 Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS)

Step 5	Formulation of Alternatives
Step 6	Estimation of Effects of Alternatives
Step 7	Selection of Preferred Management Plan (this step includes Draft and Final Resource Management Plan [RMP]/Environmental Impact Statement [EIS])
Step 8	Selection of Resource Management Plan (RMP)
Step 9	Monitoring and Evaluation

The documents produced during the Vernal Field Office RMP preparation process include:

- the preplanning analysis;
- the Analysis of Management Situation (AMS);
- the Draft RMP [Programmatic] EIS;
- the Final RMP [Programmatic] EIS (referred to hereafter as the Final EIS), which includes the Preferred Management Alternative (i.e., the Proposed RMP); and
- the Record of Decision (ROD) and Final RMP.

A detailed description of these planning steps and the documents produced is given below.

#### **1.4.1 Steps 1 and 2: Preplanning Analysis**

##### ***1.4.1.1 Step 1: Identification of issues***

Planning issues can generally be stated as resource management conflicts or questions that prevent BLM from fulfilling its multiple use resource management mission. The RMP process provides an opportunity to address these conflicts or questions. Issues may be identified by local, state or national needs, or may reflect conditions specific to the VFO. Identified issues are subject to change throughout the planning process as new conditions are identified and the public becomes fully involved.

Planning issues identify concerns that:

- present unresolved questions regarding allocation of a specific resource;
- present major land use conflicts regarding management of maintenance of a base resource; and
- present resolution by BLM within the life of the plan.

Issues are identified using the scoping process required for preparation of an EIS (40 CFR 1501.7). Scoping for this project was conducted from March 12, 2001 through December 31, 2001. During this time period, federal, state and local agencies; other stakeholders; and the general public were given the opportunity to voice concerns, identify issues, and nominate Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) (see ACECs, National Conservation Areas, and Other Special Emphasis Areas in Chapter 4 for the results of this ACEC nomination process). Additionally, management concerns were identified through discussions with BLM resource specialists. As part of this scoping process, the following public meetings were held to solicit input:

- Duchesne County Courthouse, Duchesne, Utah, October 17, 2001;

- Vernal Western Park, Vernal, Utah, October 18, 2001;
- Utah Department of Natural Resources, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 25, 2001;
- Daggett County Courthouse, Manila, Utah, November 1, 2001; and.
- Green River City Offices, Green River, Utah, November 8, 2001.

Planning issues identified for the VPA during the agency and public scoping process are described below.

**Air Quality** – The Book Cliffs RMP does not address air quality issues and the need to comply with state air quality standards. At present, there is no information that would indicate that BLM is exceeding air quality standards, but there are possible concerns with cumulative impacts to air quality, given the high degree of oil and gas development in the area. In conducting this regional planning effort, BLM would ensure compliance with all applicable local, state and federal air quality laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans. The revised RMP would identify desired future conditions and area wide criteria or restrictions that apply to direct or authorized emission-generating activities in cooperation with the State of Utah and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**Cultural and Paleontology** – There are in place numerous laws, regulations, manuals, and program guidance for the Cultural Resource Program that were not in existence during the time the existing RMPs were written. The revised RMP provides an opportunity to enhance the management of cultural and paleontological resources in the planning area. Many policies and strategies regarding consideration of Native American values, sovereignty, and coordination/consultation were not in place during the preparation of the existing RMPs. Also, acts, laws, and regulations did not exist regarding tribal government sovereignty and orientation between governments. The revised RMP would seek to actively consult with, and fully address, concerns and recognize values important to Native Americans in compliance with these new requirements.

Many new discoveries, excavations, and analyses in the field of archaeology and paleontology have also occurred since the existing RMPs were written. These new findings are beginning to change BLM's understanding of these resources in the Uintah Basin. The revised RMP would seek to provide a more active management forum including recognition of scientific, educational, recreational and other values.

**Fire Management** – The current Fire Management Plan and BLM policy allow fires that meet descriptive criteria to be monitored regardless of season. The Diamond Mountain and Book Cliffs RMPs are in conflict with current Wildland and Prescribed Fire Management Policy. The revised RMP would address appropriate fire management actions including fire rehabilitation and identify areas where fire is not desired, where fire can be used as a resource management tool for habitat restoration, and where fuel reductions are necessary.

**Woodland and Forest Management** – The existing RMPs for the VPA do not address forest health, land health, sustainability, and resiliency to disturbances, fuel loadings, fire hazard, composition, structure, and function. Treatments across the planning area would need to be implemented to meet desired future conditions.

**Hazardous Materials and Wastes** – Where appropriate, this RMP would address hazardous materials issues that may arise due to proposed oil, gas, and mineral development.

**Lands and Realty** – Considerable community growth, development, and increased use of public lands dictate the update of many goals and objectives in the Lands and Realty Management portions of the existing RMPs. This planning effort would ensure that the following are appropriately addressed:

- transportation and utility right-of-way corridors (including avoidance areas and exclusion areas);
- specific Land Use Authorization decisions determined to be appropriate in meeting specific resource goals and objectives;
- access needs;
- tenure adjustment proposals (all lands will be identified for disposal or retention); and
- land tenure adjustments or ownerships and management agreements not previously addressed that have occurred since the completion of previous planning (e.g., Hill Creek federal minerals and private lands acquired as a part of the Book Cliffs initiative and the lands near the mouth of Nine-Mile Creek acquired as mitigation).

**Rangeland Management and Health** – Resource concerns and potential conflicts have arisen regarding the allocation and season-of-use of forage within the planning area. BLM grazing regulations recognize suspended non-use if carried on a permit prior to 1995. If a permit is reduced after 1995, the animal unit months (AUMs) are not carried on the permit. A permittee may apply for temporary non-renewable AUMs; however, BLM must determine if forage is available. Isolated instances of resource degradation have occurred in site-specific areas particularly associated with seasons-of-use and forage allocation. The planning effort would ensure resolution of rangeland health concerns by addressing the following:

- incorporating standards for rangeland health into the revised RMP;
- evaluating adjustments in livestock and wildlife numbers and seasons-of-use;
- evaluating forage allocation and carrying capacity for wildlife, wild horses, and livestock; and
- evaluating range capability, including potential impacts to range health for both wildlife and wild horse populations and permitted livestock use.

**Minerals Management** – Projected mineral development would be revisited in the new planning effort. Concerns regarding the amount of oil and gas activity include direct, indirect and cumulative impacts associated with wildlife; wilderness characteristics in Section 201 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) Non-WSA lands with or likely to have wilderness characteristics; recreation; and visual resource management designations. Baseline minerals information for both RMP areas needs to be revised based on new and developing information. This planning effort would ensure that minerals management issues and opportunities described below would be considered. Potential impacts would be addressed at an appropriate regional scale.

- Update Baseline Reasonable Foreseeable Management/Development scenarios for mineral development on a regional scale.
- Update Book Cliffs RMP baseline data, including the preparation of Mineral Potential Reports, based on BLM Manual 3031 and 3060 (3031: Energy and Mineral Resource Assessments and 3060: Mineral Reports).
- Assess known Gilsonite leasing area classification.
- Review and possibly modify oil and gas leasing categories in specific areas because of changing resource conditions and issues.
- Review mitigation and lease stipulations and ensure consistency throughout the planning area. Surface use stipulations developed for oil and gas would apply across the board for all surface-disturbing activities.
- Review land tenure adjustments or ownerships and management agreements that were not previously addressed or that have occurred since the completion of previous planning, (e.g., Hill Creek Federal minerals ownership and private lands acquired as a part of the Book Cliffs initiative and the Green River mitigation lands).

**Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use and Transportation** – Growth of OHV use has become a significant issue within the planning area due to increased conflicts between OHV users and other recreationists, as well as the potential for increased soil erosion. Existing OHV use and management would be reviewed and updated, where needed to meet changing resource objectives, with an effort to resolve resource conflicts and still provide for responsible OHV use. Areas would be designated as open, limited or closed. Limited areas would have specific route designations.

**Recreation Resources and Management** – Recreation management is of significant concern within the planning area because it contains world-class recreational resources. Use has grown rapidly and is expected to continue to grow. This increase in recreational activities may bring additional risk of wildfire within Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas. This planning effort would review recreation uses and projected needs on all lands to determine appropriate management for the following:

- Special Recreation Management Areas requiring enhanced or special management for recreational uses, or for protection of recreational-related resource values; and
- Extensive Recreation Management Areas.

**Visual Resource Management (VRM)** – VRM is of significant concern given the spectacular scenery of the planning area. Changes in visitor use patterns and frequency, as well as intensive development, are causing concerns in some areas and enhanced protection of visual resources may be necessary. The existing VRM classification system would be reviewed and amended as appropriate to reflect recent changes in recreation and other uses.

**Watershed Management, Soils and Vegetation** – Current management direction is inadequate or lacking in opportunities to enhance the management of Watershed Values and Vegetation Resources. The State of Utah has developed non-point source best management practices that are applied by stipulation on a voluntary basis. This planning effort will address on a regional scale, the following management needs:

- upgraded water inventory databases in support of future planning efforts (management of these programs is not consistent between the planning areas);
- enhanced management direction for vegetative resources and watershed values;
- appropriate consideration for water quality concerns related to activities on public lands, including but not limited to, the requirements mandated by the Clean Water Act and the state water classifications in the 303D state water inventories, as well as at-risk water quality due to naturally occurring formations;
- management and control of noxious weeds and invasive species;
- appropriate conservation or restoration of at-risk watersheds;
- appropriate management of numerous special status vegetative species in order to prevent additional listings of populations;
- the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Unified Federal Policy for a Watershed Approach, and the Colorado River Basis Salinity Control Act;
- appropriate and consistent flood plain protection; and
- enhanced management direction for the inventory and protection of riparian areas in accordance with current BLM policy.

**Wild Horse Management** – Management of wild horses remains a controversial issue within the planning area. At a minimum, the planning effort would address the following:

- coordinate management of the Hill Creek herd with the Ute Indian Tribe in order to develop a mutually satisfactory course of action; and
- determine goals and objectives for the Winter Ridge herd and formulate appropriate management prescriptions.

**Wilderness Characteristics** – Management of lands with wilderness characteristics remains an extremely controversial situation in Utah. Six areas in the VFO were established as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in the 1980s and are being managed to preserve their wilderness characteristics until Congress determines whether they should be designated wilderness. Other areas have since been inventoried by the BLM and determined to have wilderness characteristics. Furthermore, the public has suggested that other areas have wilderness characteristics and should be managed to preserve those values. While the BLM would not consider designating additional WSAs in this planning process, it would consider whether non-WSA lands with or likely to have wilderness characteristics will be managed to preserve some or all of those values with other land management allocations and actions. These allocations and actions may include, but would not be limited to, designation of OHV categories, mineral leasing categories, VRM classes, special recreation management areas, Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes, and ACECs. Also, because management of these lands continues to be an issue in Utah, it is appropriate that this EIS disclose impacts to wilderness characteristics that would result from the planning alternatives.

In the area managed by the Vernal Field Office, there are non-WSA lands that were inventoried by BLM in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory*, and determined to have wilderness characteristics as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964, and there are other non-



WSA lands where BLM has determined through review of available information that they are likely to have wilderness characteristics.

Two policy memorandums, IM 2003-274, *BLM Implementation of the Settlement of Utah v. Norton Regarding Wilderness Study*, and IM 2003-275 – Change 1, *Consideration of Wilderness Characteristics in Land Use Plans*, guide the consideration of non-WSA wilderness characteristics in land use planning. They provide for BLM to consider information on individual wilderness characteristics in land use planning efforts, and to manage such lands in a way that would protect and/or preserve some or all of those characteristics. This may include protecting certain lands in their natural condition and/or providing opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation. IM 2003-275 - Change 1 defines the wilderness characteristics that may be considered in land use planning – refer to Wilderness Characteristics in the glossary.

In the development of this RMP, wilderness characteristics are considered in a manner commensurate with other resource information.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers** – As a cooperating agency involved with the development of the Vernal Field Office RMP/EIS, the State of Utah has proposed that a statewide wild and scenic river review be completed. In accordance with Section 5(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, BLM would continue to make wild and scenic river considerations through the land use planning process. Additionally, BLM would consider further statewide review at a later date.

**Other Special Management Designations** – BLM would review lands within the planning area that may meet specific designation criteria, such as ACECs and determine appropriate management prescriptions for these areas.

**Wildlife Habitat and Fisheries Management** – Neither of the current planning documents addresses recent UDWR modifications regarding boundaries for crucial deer winter range (referred to as critical by UDWR). Data concerning big game populations and habitat use are under scrutiny and proposed forage allocations for big game populations are not consistent with current allocations in the RMPs or herd objectives earlier identified by UDWR. Management prescriptions for certain species are inconsistent across planning boundaries or lacking entirely. The goals and objectives for wildlife management are limited and need updating. This planning effort would establish desired future conditions and encompass the following wildlife related concerns:

- reassessment of big game numbers, herd population trends and forage allocation consistent with the habitat carrying capacity;
- establishment of thresholds for disturbance that could be accommodated without significant impacts to wildlife populations;
- consideration of enhanced wildlife habitat mitigation actions;
- consideration of State Sensitive Plant and Animal Species and their associated habitats;
- consideration of Animal Damage Control within the scope of the national and local memorandum of understanding with Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and UDWR;

- consideration for reintroduction or transplants of native fish and wildlife species into the planning area that were not addressed during the previous planning efforts, including allocating AUMs, where appropriate; and
- consideration of species not recognized during the previous planning efforts such as newly listed threatened and endangered species, species proposed for listing, candidate species, and other non-listed special status species such as those on the Utah BLM State Director's Sensitive Species List.

#### ***1.4.1.2 Step 2: Development of Planning Criteria***

Planning criteria (Step 2) are the constraints or ground rules that guide and direct the RMP, and determine how the planning team approaches the development of alternatives and ultimately, the selection of a Preferred Management Alternative. They ensure that RMPs are tailored to the identified issues and ensure that unnecessary data collection and analyses are avoided. They focus on the decisions to be made in the RMP and achieve the following:

- provide an early, tentative basis for inventory and data collection needs;
- enable the manager and staff to develop a preliminary planning base map delineating geographic analysis units; and
- stimulate the development of planning criteria during public participation.

The planning criteria developed during the pre-planning analysis for the Vernal Field Office RMP include the following:

- The revised RMP would recognize valid existing rights.
- Lands covered in the revised RMP would be public lands, which include split estate lands managed by BLM. Decisions on lands not managed by BLM would not be made in the revised RMP.
- BLM would use a collaborative and multi-jurisdictional approach, where possible, to jointly determine the desired future condition of public lands.
- BLM would make all possible attempts to ensure that its management prescriptions and planning actions are as complimentary as possible to other planning jurisdictions, within the boundaries described by law and policy.
- Management prescriptions would be considered on adjoining lands to minimize inconsistent management. To the extent possible, inventories, planning, and management programs would be coordinated with other federal, state, and local agencies and tribal governments.
- Management prescriptions would focus on the relative values of resources and not the combination of uses that would give the greatest economic return or economic output.
- BLM would use current scientific information, research, new technologies, and the results of inventory, monitoring and coordination to determine appropriate local and regional management strategies that would enhance or restore impaired ecosystems.
- Management of WSAs would continue under the Interim Management Policy (IMP) for Lands Under Wilderness Review. Should all or part of any WSA be released by Congress from wilderness study, resource management would be as described in the RMP for that

particular area. Those areas designated wilderness by Congress would require management plans for each wilderness area.

- Gilsonite and tar sand resources would be inventoried and planning determinations would be made in the revised RMP.
- Comprehensive Land Health Standards would apply to all grazing activities.
- Adjustments to current livestock grazing or wildlife forage allocations would be considered in accordance with Rangeland Health Standards and Guides and would be applicable to all alternatives.
- VRM class designations would be analyzed and modified to reflect present conditions and future needs. Areas where specific land uses need to be modified or restricted to resolve conflicts will be identified.
- Sensitive watersheds would be identified and watershed conditions determined in particular on Utah Category One (A, B and C) watersheds and those Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC)-8 sub-basins ranked highest in the Utah Interagency Colorado Salinity Ranking Process.
- Baseline Reasonable Foreseeable Management/Development scenarios would be developed and portrayed based on historical, existing, and projected levels for all resource programs.
- Planning would include the preservation, conservation, and enhancement of important historic, cultural, paleontological, and natural components of public land resources. Coordination would be maintained with Indian tribes to identify sites, areas, and objects important to their cultural and religious heritage.
- Endangered species recovery plan goals, including plans for the reintroduction of endangered species and other species, would be addressed. In accordance with the Interagency Memorandum of Agreement on the Endangered Species Act, regarding Section 7 Consultation, BLM would jointly prepare a programmatic consultation agreement with USFWS.
- The socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives would be addressed.
- Areas potentially suitable for ACECs and other special management designations would be identified, and where appropriate, brought forward for analysis in the revised RMP.
- River segments would be considered, and determinations of eligibility, suitability, tentative classification, and protective management would be made in accordance with Section 5(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook, Public nominations will be requested.
- Revised Statute 2477 assertions, concerning the construction of roads across public lands, as proposed by counties within the planning area would be addressed with current policy.
- Vegetation management objectives or desired future conditions would be developed for all areas. Limits would be identified on the type and amount of disturbance that would be allowed before mitigation is required.

#### **1.4.2 Step 3: Inventory Data and Information Collection**

Inventory data and other information were collected according to Step 3 of the planning process) to provide a basis for preparing and monitoring the revised RMP. New information may be

collected to aid in analyzing alternatives and in making planning decisions, with emphasis on those having the greatest potential impact (refer to 43 CFR 1610.4-3).

BLM specialists have compiled a database for various resources for the revised RMP. This database was supplemented by the work of private contractors and other government agencies. For example, Utah State University was contracted to collect data on raptor nest distribution and provide delineations of greater sage-grouse habitat and crucial mule deer winter range in the Book Cliffs.

To assist in the preparation of the AMS, BLM's geographic information system (GIS) was utilized to store, display and analyze the resource data. The resource data includes acreage calculations, locations, maps, and potential resource use conflicts. Other types of management information relevant to the revised RMP/EIS were also entered into GIS. The GIS information was used as part of the revised RMP/EIS alternative formulation process.

After completion of the revised RMP, the GIS database will be used as part of ongoing resource management and as a tool for activity and project planning. Information will continue to be collected, entered, and updated. Data gaps were identified in the AMS, along with means to acquire the information over the life of the revised RMP.

#### **1.4.3 Step 4: Analysis of the Management Situation**

The AMS (Step 4) uses the information gathered in Step 3, Inventory Data and Information Collection, to describe the existing resources and facilities within the VPA and provide an analysis of the management programs administered by BLM. It also assesses the capability of the resources to meet current and present demands, and the adequacy of current management practices. Where no management concerns or conflicts are identified, current management practices will be carried forward to the final RMP. Problems that involve establishing or adjusting land use, resource allocations, or management practices will be resolved through the EIS process. Review copies of the AMS and any revisions issued will be available at the BLM VFO and the BLM Utah State Office.

#### **1.4.4 Step 5-7: Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**

The draft RMP and EIS comprise planning Steps 5 through 7: Formulation of Alternatives, Analysis and Disclosure of Impacts, and Selection of a Preferred Alternative. The No-Action alternative described in the draft RMP is the current management scenario under the existing RMPs or subsequent planning documents, and is described for each specific resource program in the AMS. Alternative actions were formulated to resolve the planning issues (problems or opportunities) described in Step 1 of the planning process. The environmental impacts of these alternative actions were compared against the impacts of the No-Action alternative. The draft EIS, which discloses the relative environmental impacts of the alternative actions and presents BLM's preferred management alternative, will be distributed for public review and comment. Following the public comment period, BLM will analyze public comments and integrate them into the proposed RMP and final EIS, as appropriate. The proposed RMP, which may differ from the earlier Preferred Alternative based on public comment, will be reviewed by the Utah State Governor for consistency with state land use plans. The proposed RMP and final EIS are subject to public protest through a formal procedure explained in 43 CFR 1610.5-2.

#### **1.4.5 Step 8: Record of Decision (ROD) and Final Resource Management Plan (RMP)**

The publication of the ROD and the final RMP completes Step 8. The ROD is not normally subject to public review unless the final RMP differs substantially from the proposed RMP due to protest resolution or the Governor's review.

The final revised RMP will provide the VFO with resource management guidance that is either taken directly from the current management described in the AMS, from resolution of administrative problems identified in the AMS, or from resolution of the planning issues identified and analyzed in the EIS.

#### **1.4.6 Step 9: Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation of the revised RMP (Step 9) will follow a set schedule and will be documented through plan supplements, amendments, or addenda.

### **1.5 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROGRAMS, PLANS, AND POLICIES**

This process recognizes the many ongoing programs, plans, and policies that are being implemented in the planning area by other land managers and interested governments. Wherever possible, BLM decisions would be consistent with or complimentary to the management actions arising from these programs, plans, and policies. The following plans are located within or adjacent to the planning area and will be reviewed during this planning process.

#### *County Land Use Plans*

Daggett County, Utah:	Daggett County General Plan
Duchesne County, Utah:	Duchesne County General Plan
Grand County, Utah:	Grand County General Plan
Uintah County, Utah:	A. Uintah County General Plan
	B. Uintah County Plan for Management of the Book Cliffs Resource Area
	C. Ordinance No. 9-25-2000A, Wild Horse Habitat on Public Land
Garfield County, Colorado:	Garfield County General Plan
Moffat County, Colorado:	Moffat County General Plan
Rio Blanco County, Colorado:	Rio Blanco County General Plan
Sweetwater County, Wyoming:	Sweetwater County General Plan

#### *State of Utah*

1. Division of State Parks and Recreation, Steinaker and Red Fleet State Plans.

#### *Other Federal Plans*

1. Ashley National Forest Land Use Plan
2. Dinosaur National Monument Plan
3. Ouray National Wildlife Refuge Plan
4. Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge Plan

*Activity Plans*

1. Recreation and Cultural Management Plan for Nine-Mile Canyon; Joint Management Plan; completed in 1994 by Vernal and Price Field Offices
2. Green River Management Plan; Joint Management Plan; completed in 1996 by VFO and Ashley National Forest
3. John Jarvie Historic District Site Management Plan; completed in 1988 and amended in 1989

*Habitat Management Plans*

1. Myton Habitat Management Plan; completed in 1979
2. Diamond Mountain/Ashley Creek Habitat Management Plan; completed in 1983
3. Browns Park Habitat Management Plan; completed in 1987.

*Endangered Species Recovery Plans*

1. Northern States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan; completed in 1983.
2. The Recovery Implementation Plan for the Endangered fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin; completed in 1987.
3. Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Plan; completed in 1988.
4. Bonytail Chub Recovery Plan; completed in 1990.
5. Humpback Chub Recovery Plan; completed in 1990
6. Colorado Squawfish Recovery Plan; completed in 1991.
7. Razorback Sucker Recovery Plan; completed in 1999.
8. Uintah Basin Hookless Cactus Recovery Plan; completed in 1990.
9. American Peregrine Falcon Recovery Plan, completed in 1984
10. Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, completed in 1995
11. Draft Ute ladies-tresses Recovery Plan
12. Conservation and Research Plans for Four Plant Species in Northeastern Utah (White River Beardtongue, Goodrich Beardtongue, Graham Beardtongue, and Horseshoe Milkvetch) completed 2003

*Existing Environmental Impact Statements*

1. Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness EIS; completed in 1990.
2. PR Spring Combined Hydrocarbon Lease Conversion EIS; completed in 1985.
3. Utah Combined Hydrocarbon Leasing Regional EIS; completed in 1984.
4. Wild and Scenic River Study, Green and Yampa Rivers EIS; released in 1983.
5. White River Dam Project, EIS; completed in 1982.
6. Uintah Basin Synfuels Development EIS; completed in 1983.

## **1.6 RELATIONSHIP TO THE PRESIDENT’S NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY AND THE SCIENTIFIC INVENTORY OF ONSHORE FEDERAL LANDS’ OIL AND GAS RESOURCES AND RESERVES, AND THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF RESTRICTIONS OR IMPEDIMENTS TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT**

The President’s comprehensive National Energy Policy, issued in May 2001, directed the Secretary to “...examine land status and lease stipulation impediments to federal oil and gas leasing, and review and modify those where opportunities exist (consistent with the law, good environmental practice and balanced use of other resources).

Under this directive the Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals Management delivered to Congress an inventory of U.S. Oil and Gas resources in five western basins, as well as the extent and nature of any restrictions or impediments to the to their development. This report was prepared at the request of Congress under the provisions of the 2000 Energy Policy and Conservation Act (EPCA).

In April 2003, the Bureau specified four EPCA Integration Principles as follows:

1. environmental protection and energy production are both desirable and necessary objectives of sound land management practices and are not to be considered mutually exclusive priorities;
2. BLM must ensure the appropriate amount of accessibility to energy resources necessary for the nation’s security while recognizing that special and unique non-energy resources can be preserved;
3. sound planning will weigh the relative resources values consistent with the Federal Land Management Policy Act; and
4. all resource impacts, including those associated with energy development and transmission, will be mitigated to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation.

By July 29, 2003 BLM started to provide direction necessary to outline a strategy for integrating EPCA inventory results into land use plans.

## **1.7 HOW VERNAL FIELD OFFICE RMP CONSIDERED EPCA INVENTORY INFORMATION AND CONCERNS**

The VFO is located partially within the Uintah/Piceance oil and gas basin, one of seven areas identified as priority basins in the EPCA inventory (see Map 1). The VFO and their contractors conducted an extensive review of the inventory data regarding energy resources within the planning area. That data is profiled in the Vernal RMP and consists primarily of two types of information as outlined in EPCA: 1) data on oil and gas resources (volumetric data), and 2) data on leasing constraints. This data is considered an important part of our administrative record for the RMP.

The EPCA volumetric data is portrayed in the Affected Environment section of the EIS. BLM also considered many other sources of energy related data including USGS and Utah Geologic Survey (UGS) information, industry information, as well as some academic work completed on oil and gas plays and areas with potential for occurrence of mineral resources. This information is part of the more detailed Mineral Potential Report prepared in support of the planning effort.

In addition to the Mineral Potential Report, BLM prepared a projected Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario to project environmental impacts through the next 15-year period. Development projections included in-depth reviews of potential for occurrence, past well production, current well production, and future potential for production.

BLM also conducted additional support work regarding energy related management and energy benefits in the AMS as well as the Socio-Economic Baseline Report which characterize the significant beneficial impacts of energy and mineral development for the Uintah Basin.

Also, as part of EPCA, a review was provided outlining existing leasing constraints within the focus areas. Data on proposed and existing leasing constraints specific to the proposed Vernal RMP are provided in the minerals section of the alternatives matrix (Chapter 2).